

CONSTANCY AND INCONSTANCY—A CONTRAST

NO. 852

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 24, 1869,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning;
and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.*

*O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you?
For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away.”*

Hosea 6:3, 4.

THESE two verses very fitly describe in very similar imagery the opposite characters of the true and persevering believer, and the fictitious and the transient professor. There are many things in this world which are very much alike, and yet are totally dissimilar; the king who, after stern conflict and arduous struggles, has at last obtained the empire, shines not with greater pomp than yonder actor mimicking majesty upon the stage in borrowed robes and tinsel crown; how like each other that monarch and the player, and yet how wide the difference! The one rules with real power, the other with but fancied sway—the king has fought for many a day to earn the scepter, the other in a few minutes in the green room has attained his monarchy, and we may add, in a few minutes more he will lose it, too! As in a mirror, see here the true Christian, and the base pretender to that royal name. Take into your hand this paste gem so skillfully manufactured, how exceedingly like a diamond; yet this was made in almost the twinkling of an eye, while yonder sparkling gem of real adamant has taken years even, to cut its facets on the wheel, yet when that paste gem with other unconsidered trifles shall be resolved into the vile dust from where it sprang, that sparkling jewel shall shine with as clear a radiance of morning light within it as flashes from it now! Such is the true heir of heaven, and the hypocrite when seen by the eye of wisdom. Look but a year or two ago at two houses of business, how like each other; how large their transactions, how respectable their names, yet the one all hollow, its capital long spent, its reputation all a bubble; the other solid and substantial, with ample means, and large connections—this last has outlived the storm of commercial panic, while its rival has long been stranded and left a total wreck! Even thus men trade with heaven, and such are the differing results. We will inspect those two fine vessels upon the stocks, and unless well educated in the art of shipbuilding, who shall give a preference to the one or the other? But see them out at sea, let old Boreas blow, let the Atlantic rollers advance in their fury, and you shall see how the flimsy ill-built ship opens at every timber, her bolts loosen, her entire hull is disjointed and shivered, she is blown down and sinks to her doom! But the other vessel, built of sterner stuff, well bolted, with seasoned timbers all fitted, staunch and sound, braves the fury of the tempest, and reaches her desired haven. After this sort does the sea of life try the sons of men, and discern between the precious and the vile! As in the outer world things may be very like, and yet have no likeness, so in the *spiritual* world there are persons so like Christians that even a seraph's judgment could not detect the imposter! There are characters so like to that which the renewed nature exhibits, that even if you lived with the man, you scarcely could tell him to be a counterfeit; and yet after a little time and trial, the lies ooze through, and the man is found out. If some of the remarks of this morning should help us to test and try *ourselves* and lead some into comfort, and others into anxiety, I shall be very grateful, and so will *you* who shall receive the blessing!

The first verse seems to me to describe *the constancy of God to those who are really His people*; and the second, *the inconstancy of men in their dealings with their God*.

I. Let us commence with the third verse of our text, and accept it as a description of THE CONSTANCY OF GOD TOWARDS THOSE WHO ARE HIS PEOPLE.

It is our solemn conviction that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance—that wherever the Lord bestows spiritual life and salvation He *never* recalls the gift—that it is not His wish to play fast and loose with the sons of men, to give today, and retract tomorrow. We enjoy the doctrine of final perseverance, and cannot think how anyone can doubt it. Without doubt or fear we sing—

*“Who once He loves He never leaves,
But loves them to the end.”*

We are persuaded of the immutable love of God towards His children, but note the connection of the text leads us to observe the fact, *the constancy of God to His people is not occasioned by their constancy to Him*, for Ephraim and Judah, of whom this text was written, were the most fickle and inconstant of people; they were unstable as water towards their God. He brings accusations such as these against them—“Israel slides back as a backsliding heifer.” “Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment”—that is, the *evil* commandment of heathen kings. All through the book of Hosea there are exhortations to repentance and returning from backsliding. If then, God remained faithful towards such a people it was not because they remained faithful to Him! The fact is that wherever there is in any Christian a holy patience, and a diligent perseverance, this is the work of *God* in his soul, and is worked in him by the faithful grace, and abiding presence of God! It is not *our* faithfulness which holds God to His promise, but it is *God’s* faithfulness which holds us near to Him. Ah, Lord, if Your love should not hang on, our poor love which is as a rusted nail driven into rotten wood, even our salvation would soon fail! But when we hang upon Your faithfulness in Christ Jesus, how safe we are! Ah, if one single stone of the entire fabric of our salvation had to be quarried out of our carnal nature, it could never be found, for our whole nature is as a miry place, a bog in which nothing stable can be discovered. Beloved, though we believe not, God abides faithful; though we twist and turn aside a thousand times, yet He brings His wandering servants back, and restores them to His ways, out of the infinite love and compassion of His heart. I know some prostitute this doctrine into an excuse for sin; oh, mean and sensual hearts; they are base-born pretenders to a divine grace they never knew! If they found not this excuse, they would make another, for they are generations apt in lies, and well skilled in perverting the truth of God to their own purposes; they turn the grace of God into licentiousness, and their damnation is just! But no converted man ever found an apology for sin in the immutability of divine affection! No, but this is the greatest condemnation of our sin—that we transgress against a God who still loves us, that we dare to play the traitor to Him who never for a moment was inconstant in His love to us! If a husband were unstable in his marriage love, there were some excuse for the unfaithful wife—but the firmness of our Great Husband’s love to our souls makes it the blackest treason, and the most accursed unchastity if our hearts turn aside from our Best Beloved to follow after idols! The fountain does not depend on the stream or the sun upon its beams, or the soil upon the flowers—effects depend on *causes*—not causes on effects! And so the attending love of God does not depend upon the constancy of His people.

Note next, that *the faithfulness of God to His people does not always show itself in the most pleasing ways*. The first verse tells us that God had torn and struck His people, and the last verse of the former chapter represents the Lord as saying, “I will go and return to My place.” A father’s love does not always reveal itself in kisses and gifts of sweets; love often has to force itself to blows and stripes, and those black love tokens which blossom upon the rod of chastisement are as true proofs of a father’s kindness as the soft blandishment, and sweet endearments which at other times he lavishly scatters. Our God does not indulge His people with constant prosperity, lest they drown in the river of worldliness; his beloved are often plunged in troubles—“Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” and their troubles are not only outward—the iron enters into their soul, also. We who have believed have our deep-sea sorrows, and our downcastings when every wave and billow goes over us, smart under dreadful desertions. Some of us have had to cry with the Master on the cross, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken

me?” We *know* why He has forsaken us; it is because we have forsaken Him, and therefore He has hidden the light of His countenance from us until we could scarcely believe ourselves to be His children at all. We have turned to prayer and found words, and even *desires* fail us when on our knees; we have searched the Scriptures with no consolatory result—every text of Scripture has looked black upon us; every promise blockaded its ports against us; we have tried to raise a single thought heavenward, but have been so distracted under a sense of the Lord’s wrath which lay heavy upon us, that we could not even aspire for a moment! We could only say, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me?” Such suffering of soul will often be to the erring Christian the very best thing that could befall him; he has walked contrary to his God, and if his God did *not* walk contrary to him, he would be at peace in his sin. Remember, no condition can be more dangerous, not to say damnable, than for a man who is no longer agreed with his God to believe that all is well, and go on softly and delicately in the way which tends to destruction. Brothers and sisters, I have to thank God, and I think you may join with me, for many a sharp pang which has gone through the soul, for many a sharp cut which has come from a stinging text of Scripture when that word of God has searched us through and through, and like a strong corrosive, or sharp acid, has burnt its way into our inmost soul, destroying and maiming in us much that we looked upon as precious and admirable! The faithfulness of God does not always wear silken robes, and is not always arrayed in scarlet and fine linen, but it puts on steel armor, and comes out to us, sword in hand, cutting and wounding, and making us bleed. It is very faithfulness which thus afflicts us! In love and tenderness God often seems to deal harshly with His children; He hurls them upon the ground, and crushes them till they lie like a bleeding, helpless mass of wounds and faintness—ready to perish, and overwhelmed with anguish. “Their thoughts,” as George Herbert says, “Are all a case of knives,” piercing their souls, and not a ray of comfort, nor a word of promise succors them! It is clear, then, that God does not always show His immutable love to His people in the way which they might select; His wine is not sent to us always in golden flagons, nor His apples of love in baskets of gold. Good comes in a chariot of fire, and mercy rides on the pale horse.

But, for all that, *God reveals Himself comfortably to His saints in proof of His faithfulness in a timely and sure manner.* Turn to the second verse, and learn that we may be as if dead for two days, but no child of God can be dead *eternally*. We may lie buried in the sepulcher of our despair for two days and nights—nights cold, and days black, but “the third day He will raise us up.” We cannot raise *ourselves* up, but He will raise us up! God, who raises the dead, is our Savior; glory be to His name, we may be as dead and lifeless, and as far removed from right desires as the carcasses that rot beneath the sod, but He will raise us up, and “we shall live in His sight!” What would we do when God leaves us to be cast down, and to feel our spiritual death and emptiness, if it were not for such a promise as this which certifies the soul sepulchered in sorrow that the Lord will raise up? If your heart is right towards God, and you are indeed trusting in none but Christ, it is no more possible for you to die of despair than for Christ Himself to return to the tomb! He *must* rise when the third morning comes, and so must *you*! Death cannot hold the immortal Son when once the hour of resurrection dawns—and despair and darkness cannot hold the believer in Jesus one moment longer in bondage when the decree of deliverance goes forth! The promise will yet come forth to meet you with tabouret and harp! The Holy Spirit will yet shed abroad in your heart the love of God like the oil of joy! You shall be crowned with loving-kindnesses as with sweet flowers, and with consolations as with wines on the lees shall you be refreshed. Not all the devils in hell shall be able to stop you of your glorying, or imprison your quickened energy; you who are passing through the valley of the shadow of death may look for the sun rising; angels’ wings are bringing consolations for you. O mourner, mourning dies at morning! Still cling to Jesus in your extremity, and believe that He is able to save to the uttermost, and you shall live to sing of judgment and of mercy in the great congregation of the faithful! “Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” You shall pass through the gate of tears into the sea of pearls; you shall cross by the bridge of sighs to the palace of content; the bittern and the owl shall fly away, and the lark and the nightingale shall sing of bliss; you may groan and sigh like a Jeremy, but you shall yet dance and feast like a David! The tents of

Kedar shall no more enclose you, but you shall dwell between the curtains of Solomon! All in good time when wisdom ordains the hour,” Mordecai, who sat in sackcloth at the gate, shall ride in triumph from the palace, and Job, penniless upon his dunghill, shall have twice as much as before!

This fact is illustrated by *two metaphors* in the text. It is said that the child of God who follows on in the path of faith, despite the wounding and the striking which he may suffer, shall without doubt know the faithfulness of God whose, “going forth is prepared as the morning.” Observe this figure, for it is very comforting and instructive. Note the preparation spoken of: the morning comes not unlooked for like one in haste with hair disheveled, and garments in disarray. In the gloomiest watch of the night preparations are being made for the dawning of the day; the sun’s flaming chariot is hastening with glowing axles along the celestial road to reach again that eastern climate from which he comes to us sowing the earth with orient pearls.

As soon as the earth by its continued revolutions has taken Great Britain away from the light of the sun, it begins at once to hasten its return; every moment of the night this portion of our planet is moving on towards the light; the world is spinning round in the silent hours of night so as to bring our little island as speedily as possible once more under the morning rays! On the black wings of night the dawning is hastening, and even thus, at the worst period of our sorrows, there is a preparation being made for a turn of the tide! Our winter is making ready for our summer! You tell me you do not see how this can be so, but even you might see it if you would consider, and if you cannot see it, at any rate I pray you *believe* it, for surely it is so. You clearly see God in nature bringing on the morning by allowing the passage of the night—and within your heart He is preparing you for joy, brightness, and comfort by your present sorrows. Is He not teaching you to value His presence by making you know how bitter it is to be without it? Is He not humbling you that it may be safe to exalt you, emptying you that there may be more room for His fullness? Is He not now sharpening your spiritual desires, and quickening your heavenly appetites to make the feast of His love the more welcome? Is He not now purging you, but not with silver—refining you in the furnace of affliction, that you may be made a vessel unto honor fit for the Master’s use? Oh, yes, the morning is prepared for you! Faith’s eye can detect the first streaks of the light upon the horizon! Hope is already come to you like a John the Baptist, to foretell the coming of the Lord! Sing, for the day breaks, and the shadows flee away!

But the text not only speaks of preparation; the figure evidently sets forth *certainty*. The Lord’s goings forth of mercy are as sure as the return of day.

No power known to us can put off tomorrow morning by so much as an hour; it is ordained that the sun shall rise at such a time, and rise it will! The publication of an Act of Parliament by which the night should be prolonged would be an act of insanity; the gathering together of all the armies of the nations to hold back the sun, even for a single second, from his predestinated time of rising would be a monstrous freak of madness! Surely the sun, all blithely rising from his rest, would look upon the nations of the earth assembled to stay his course, and scatter his laughing beams among them, with contempt! Truly thus it is with the presence of God in the regenerate soul. Saints have their times to mourn, and mourn they must, but in their time of dancing they shall dance, let who will howl at their sacred mirth. If April has its showers, May shall have its flowers; when God appoints, none can alter it. The joy which is sown for the righteous shall grow into waving sheaves, and blight nor withering wind shall prevent the golden ears. When God’s time comes to turn mourning into joy, none shall say no to Him; neither shall cold death freeze the genial current of our soul, nor hell obscure with rising smoke the landscape of our hope, nor sin, with serpent’s trail defile our Eden’s joys, nor trouble, with its rough wind, sweep through the bowers of our bliss! The King shall walk with us in the quiet garden of meditation, and our joy shall be full! Rejoice in this, believer! Your hope does not lie in what is in *you*; your darkness is very dark, but the sun is bright, exceedingly bright, and God at His own time shall bid the light come streaming into your soul!

The figure brings before us not only the idea of preparation and certainty, but that of *naturalness*; art and science could not have done as well what nature achieves with divine simplicity; there is no light

like that of the sun! God does gloriously what we could not do with all our toils. Brothers and sisters, I have tried oftentimes, when I have lost the light of my Lord's countenance, to set myself right by earnest efforts, but I have never succeeded. I have tried to make myself earnest, to make myself believing, to make myself spiritually-minded, but it is wretched work! It is an attempt to pump sweet water out of a sour soil! But let the Lord Himself appear—and He *will* appear when we give up all our *own* attempts, and cast ourselves wholly upon Him, and then what we could not do in that we were weak through the flesh is all accomplished at once, to the glory of our God, and to the sweet solace of our soul!

Observe that this metaphor of the morning sets forth the *glorious efficiency* of the grace of God. The morning never fails to light up the land on which it smiles; the illumination is never half-done; the light is bright, clear, effectual, and no darkness visible, or mingled gloom and gleam. The sun itself wears an excess of brightness upon which no eye of mortal man may steadfastly gaze, and from that central orb, over hill and valley, rolls a flood of glory unrivalled in its splendor! Thus let the Lord but once come into our poor dark souls, how bright they become! Let Him but visit us, and the barren woman does keep house and becomes a joyous mother of children! We who were farthest off from God, and thought ourselves to be withered branches and dead plants yielding not so much as a bud for the Master's glory, even *we* begin to sprout and bring forth fruit! Yes, and fruit unto *perfection*, like Aaron's famous rod of old. We are made to wonder, as we see God's handiwork in such poor creatures as we are. Let no Christian despair! Let no child of God, in his long wintry nights, begin to mistrust his God! His coming forth is as the morning, and it shall be such a coming! Oh, such a coming that your soul, now so empty, shall not merely be filled, but shall overflow! The Lord will not give a mere sip to you who are thirsty, but He has said it, "I will pour water upon him who is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground." All, and *more* than all your heart can desire shall be furnished you at the coming of your Master!

The second figure is equally beautiful, "He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." There were two great rains in Palestine. One rain fell at the time when the seed was cast into the ground; almost as soon as the farmer who watched the seasons had turned over the soil, and dropped in his golden grain, there fell heavy showers which lasted for some time. Usually rain did not fall again for months, but it returned again when the ear was well-formed and needed filling up. The farmer was always thankful for the rain; it plumped out the seed, and when the return of fair weather ripened it, the harvest was abundant. Now the Lord's presence is to all His people as the two rains to the seed. What a shower of grace He gives us when first the seed is sown in our hearts!—

*"What peaceful hours we then enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!"*

Well do we recollect the love of our espousals, the time of peace, and of drawing near to God, and those first early years of our religion were very, very happy; we grew as the lily, and we cast forth our roots like the cedars of Lebanon. All went well with us, but with many a Christian the lament is put up—

*"They have left an aching void,
The world can never fill."*

Beloved, you should be looking out for the next rain. You have had *one*, you shall have another! God will give you a shower of blessings—it may be today. You are very barren, well, it is to the barren and to the dry that God delights to give His mercy! If the grace of God only came to those who *deserved* it, it would not be grace at all! If it only visited those who could *claim* it, it would be a matter of debt and not a free gift, but since it is the wish of God to give His grace to the most *unworthy*, why should He not give it to you and to me? Since He gives the riches of His love to those who need them most, then, my heart, put up your claim, for none need it more than you do! If you can but look right out of yourself to your God, and trust in Him, then be assured as the rain falls upon the thirsty pastures of the wilderness, and fills the pools and makes the little hills rejoice on every side, so your God who visited you before will deal graciously with you again, and turn your barrenness into verdure, and all your drought into plenty! Lord, let it be so, and we will bless Your name! This is what our heavenly Father aims at to get praise from the lips of His children. Let us offer prayer in our inmost heart today, that our Lord Jesus,

the Beloved of our souls, may come down like rain upon the mown grass, and that the result in us may bring to God revenue of glory from refreshed hearts.

Beloved, the drift of all this is just this—earnest Christians, in toiling towards heaven, often grow faint, and year after year in the pursuit of righteousness, human nature becomes weary of the daily watching unto prayer; but the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen His saints for the pilgrimage lest they faint or turn aside; the Lord will renew the strength of those who wait on Him, so that they shall hold on their way. Poor traveler to Mount Zion, the devil tells you that you will soon turn back unto perdition, but be of good courage, mighty is He that is *in* you! His grace is sufficient for you! The divine life within you will not stop its sacred impulse for the holy and the heavenly till it has brought you up from the wilderness, and lodged you within the palace gate of Jehovah!

II. Now, with too short a time to deal rightly with it, let us take the second text. The second text speaks of THE INCONSTANCY OF MEN TO GOD.

Though there are many illustrations of this sad fact, I shall only take one, namely, that which unconverted people so constantly furnish us with. Not many days ago I thought I saw the Alps. I have stood on the platform at Berne and viewed with growing wonder that magnificent range of the snow-clad Alps, and the other day within a few miles of this spot, in our own county of Surrey, I saw upon the horizon clouds which were the very facsimile of Switzerland's glorious mountains! To me there seemed no perceptible difference—the snowy masses of cloud were the exact counterpart of the Alps! Had I just risen from my sleep and not known where I was, I would have said, "I am at Berne, looking at the mountains which I saw years ago." Yet before some five minutes had passed, the fair vision had melted away, and there were no peaks of granite there, but mere aggregations of vapor. How often have I seen Christians, as I have thought; and as all others have thought, and I have rejoiced and blessed God over what seemed converted men and women! But before long we have had clear proof that we have been grossly deceived. There was goodness in them—the text calls it "goodness"—but it was only such nominal goodness as nature boasts of, and it vanished "like the morning cloud." Observe the contrasting metaphor—God's love is the morning, man's fair promise is but the morning cloud. A mist is often seen in Palestine early in the morning and the farmer hopes that the drought will come to an end, but it mocks his hopes, and there is no rain—the cloud is exhaled in the sun, and the earth is as parched as ever. Early dew is also mentioned as a very fleeting thing, a child of the night, it is gone when the sun looks upon it. So is it with the religion of hundreds of people of whom we in charity judge hopefully, but concerning whom we are deceived. Many hear a sermon, and are impressed, but their impression is soon gone; they remind one of the famous preacher who, while earnestly exciting the people by a description of the next world, and the terrors of it, when he saw them all bursting into tears and using their handkerchiefs freely, stopped and said, "Dry your eyes, for I have something much more terrible to tell you than anything I have as yet spoken; it is this—you will, all of you, forget the impressions that are made today, and go your way to live as you have done before." This is the worst point of all, that after bearing a true report to our fellow men concerning most weighty matters, the messengers of the truth of God are forced to cry, "Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Our hearers appear to believe, but having eyes, they see not, and having ears, they hear not so as to understand. Some cases are particularly painful to remember because their impressions continue—so continue that they reform their manners; they begin to pray; Spiritual life apparently visits them; they take a great delight in holy company; they are much in reading the word. And yet all is gone, and they become as before! We have seen so much about certain people that we thought admirable, that we were ready to think if *they* were not converted, *we* were not, and yet they have gone back, and the house of God sees them no more—or if the house sees their bodily presence, yet their heart is not in the worship. I fear we get a sad number of this sort into church membership; young people, impressed early when they have not known temptation because they have not gone out from their parents' homes, too often disappoint us in later life. The seed springs up, but under the hot sun of temptation it withers away. Ah, and this is sad. According to the text

it is mournful to the heart of God Himself that there should be goodness enough to be comparable to a cloud and to dew, and yet, like both cloud and dew the goodness should utterly pass away.

Brothers and sisters, you see the case before us—you see how like the hopefulness of some is to the reality that is in others—how near akin the morning cloud is to the morning, and how like that early dew is to the heavenly shower! What is the reason why so many thus deceive themselves and us? Is not it in most cases the lack of a deep perception of sin? Though I rejoice in sudden conversions, I entertain grave suspicions of those suddenly happy people who seem never to have sorrowed over their sin. I am afraid that those who come by their religion so very lightly often lose it quite as lightly. Saul of Tarsus was converted suddenly, but no man ever went through a greater horror of darkness than he did before Ananias came to him with the words of comfort. I like deep plowing—skimming topsoil is poor work! The tearing of the soil under surface is greatly needed; after all, the most lasting Christians appear to be those who have seen their inward disease to be very deeply seated and loathsome, and after a while have been led to see the glory of the healing hand of the Lord Jesus as He stretches it out in the gospel. I am afraid that in much modern religion there is a lack of depth on all points; they neither deeply tremble nor greatly rejoice; they neither much despair nor much believe. Oh, beware of pious veneering! Beware of the religion which consists in putting on a thin slice of godliness over a mass of carnality! We must have thorough work *within*! The grace which reaches the *core*, and affects the innermost spirit is the only grace worth having! To put all in one word, *a lack of the Holy Spirit* is the great cause of religious instability! Beware of mistaking excitement for the Holy Spirit; or your own resolutions for the deep workings of the Spirit of God in the soul. All that ever nature paints God will burn off with hot irons; all that nature ever spins God will unravel and cast away with the rags. You must be born from above! You must have a new nature worked in you by the finger of God Himself! Of all His saints it is written, “You are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus.” Oh, but everywhere, I fear, there is a lack of the Holy Spirit! There is much getting up of a tawdry morality, barely skin deep; much crying, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace, and very little deep heart-searching anxiety to be thoroughly purged from sin. Well-known and well-remembered truths of God are believed without an accompanying impression of their weight; hopes are flimsily formed, and confidences ill-founded, and it is this which makes deceivers so plentiful, and fair shows after the flesh so common.

According to the text—and I ask your solemn attention to this remark—such persons are the objects of mercy’s anxiety. Observe it—it looks as if justice and mercy held a dialogue. “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you?” “Sweep him away,” says Justice, “the man vows and promises, only to play the liar’s part; he says he will repent, but turns again like a dog to his vomit; he declares he will be saved, but he goes back like a sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire.” “Spare him,” says Mercy, “spare him, O God! You can yet give him a new heart instead of that fickle heart, and a right spirit in lieu of that wayward spirit! He is a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, but, Lord, You have broken others into Your service, break him in also!” So Justice urges one thing, and Mercy pleads another, and therefore the conflict, “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you?” The Lord has two courses open to Him; the first is He can leave you altogether; the man has heard the gospel; he has had it preached to him affectionately, and he has felt its power in a measure. He shall never hear it again—and if he goes down to hell, he cannot say he had not an opportunity; he will not be able, amidst the fires of the pit to say, “I never heard the gospel, and I never was impressed with it.” “Mercy,” says Justice, “you have had your turn; the man has had enough of you, and he is not bettered by you. Come, put up your silver scepter, Mercy, I have a more potent weapon; let me try my sharp, two-edged sword; they who will not bend, shall break, and he who will not stoop shall be dashed to the ground as with a rod of iron!” Our compassionate God has, however, another alternative, and that is to try something more with you deceptive ones. I could wish that some of you unconverted people who have been hearing me a long while would not come to this Tabernacle again; I speak out of kindness. I wish, if God would be pleased to convert you by somebody else, that you might be led at once to attend that ministry which He will bless to your souls. Perhaps I am not adapted to your case; perhaps the Lord will never make use

of me as a net to take such a fish as you are. Well, try somebody else, but oh, do not grow so used to my voice as to go to sleep under it, and so sleep yourselves into hell! May the Lord resolve, “I will send another preacher.” If my Master takes me away to my grave, and sends another who will be blessed to you, I am well content. Perhaps, however, the Lord will try what providence can do with you; you have lost your wife, what if He takes away the child? Or, good mother, you have buried a dear child, and your *darling’s* going to heaven has not tempted *you* to the skies! What if the Lord takes away your husband? If He loves you, He will not give you up nor spare your feelings, but will bring you to repentance by any means, however severe! If the Lord does not give you up, and you do not soon repent, it will come to this—He will strip every earthly comfort away from you; He will hedge up your way with thorns and so will *compel* you to come to Himself!

It may be that some of you will never be saved while you are well-to-do in this world. Well then, the very mercy of God will make you poor, and perhaps when your belly is hungry like the prodigal’s, you will cry, “I will arise and go to my Father.” This I am sure of—if the Lord takes the alternative of not giving you up, but of saving you—if He tries gentle means, and they succeed not, He *will* turn to rougher methods. You shall be beaten with many stripes; the fire shall burn up your comforts; the moth and rust shall consume your treasures; the light of your eyes shall be taken from you at a stroke; your children shall die before your eyes, or the partner of your bosom shall be laid in the grave—for by any means God will bring you in! He has determined to save you, and He will do it, let it cost what it may! He spared not His *own Son* to save you, and He will not spare *yours*. Nor will He spare your body. You shall be worn with disease, and wasted with sickness; you shall have misery of soul, and despair of heart, but He will save you if He so resolves upon it. And for this you shall one day bless His name and kiss the rod by which He chastened you to Himself! He seems to me to say this morning to those of you who are unsaved after many impressions, “What more can I do than I have done?” And the answer must be, “Lord, there is only one thing more; send Your Divine Spirit this morning on dove-like wings, and change my poor heart. Lord, You have tried the means, now come to me Yourself! O my God, I am undone, I am lost; I am hopeless, but there is one hope left! Your arm can save! Your eyes can pity, and Your voice can comfort.”

O God, this morning, in Your plenteous mercy, deal graciously with such souls, and let Your mercy be extolled in the very highest as You lift up the beggar from the dunghill to set him among princes! I feel the hope in my own soul that to some of the most despairing and sad, the true light of God has already come, and from now on they shall rejoice! God make it so, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HOSEA 6 and LUKE 8:4-13.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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